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Figure in International Espionage Case Says Suspect

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LOS ANGELES, April 8 — A figure in an international espionage case has said he has never been a spy, asserting that a suspect in the case was seeking to frame him in hopes of obtaining a reduced prison sentence.

William Bell Hugle, long a prominent figure in California's Silicon Valley electronics industry, has been accused by James D. Harper, another electronics engineer, of complicity in the case.

Mr. Harper is scheduled to go on trial in San Francisco April 24 on charges that he sold secret data about the Minuteman missile to a Polish intelligence agent, Zdzislaw Pryzychodzien, beginning in 1979.

In an affidavit filed by prosecutors, Mr. Harper is quoted as saying that he was introduced to Mr. Pryzychodzien

by Mr. Hugle and a deal was made under which Mr. Hugle was to receive a third of any proceeds from the sale of classified data to the Polish agent.

No Charges Lodged

Although prosecutors identified Mr. Hugle last fall as a "target" of their investigation, he has not been arrested and no charges have been lodged against him.

Lawyers for Mr. Harper have stated that he was prepared to testify against Mr. Hugle in return for a reduced sentence, but plea negotiations with the prosecution were stalled until last week because the Federal District Judge, Samuel Conti, who will try the case, reserved the right to sentence Mr. Harper to death.

A Federal appellate court ruled Tuesday that the statutes did not allow

Is Using Him

the death penalty in the case. That has caused speculation that Mr. Harper and the Government would reach an agreement under which he would testify against Mr. Hugle in return for a relatively light sentence.

In a telephone interview Thursday from Paris, where he is seeking capital for a new electronics venture, Mr. Hugle asserted that Mr. Harper knew nothing that could implicate him in espionage.

"I had no knowledge whatsoever of what he was doing; I was completely surprised, absolutely astounded" when he was arrested, Mr. Hugle said, adding, "I haven't seen Harper in five years."

"What's more likely," he said, "and this is sheer speculation, is that some people in Silicon Valley did cooperate with him, but he chose to name me because I was prominent" and it would protect others who were guilty.

Mr. Hugle denied a report in a California newspaper that he had done "several jobs" for the Central Intelligence Agency. He said he had used contacts in Iran in 1979 and 1980 to try to help free the American hostages held by militants who took over the country, which had been previously reported. But he denied having done anything else for the intelligence agency and said he did not expect it to intervene on his behalf.

Mr. Hugle acknowledged that he had known Mr. Pryzychodzien, but considered him a legitimate Polish businessman. He said he might have introduced him to Mr. Harper, but added, "I never received a dime" from any of their transactions.